VIEWS

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Carlucci's First Test

An intense internal struggle over the significance of a huge new Soviet radar on the Polish border, confirmed by U.S. intelligence Nov. 10, awaits Frank Carlucci in his first test as President Reagan's national security adviser. New intelligence on this and other secret radars has split Reagan's men on a treaty-compliance issue that raises the question of national survival.

CIA Director William Casey and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger believe the United States may soon face a completed, wholly illegal Soviet antimissile system that would hand Moscow military preeminence and dangerous political leverage. The view from State is more cautious, on grounds all evidence is not yet in. How to break the deadlock may be Carlucci's first advice to the Oval Office. It will test whether he can restore the national security role to its intended function of sorting out conflicting departmental views for the president.

The shrouded policy struggle has been intense enough to postpone the president's annual report to Congress on Soviet compliance with its treaty obligations, the most authoritative statement he makes on Soviet nuclear activities. Last year Reagan told Congress Moscow "may be preparing an ABM defense system of its national territory." Weinberger and Casey, backed by senior national security bureaucrats, want this year's report to go further, helping those who want the president to start "near-term" deployment of his Strategic Defense Initiative.

Discovery of the new Polish-border radar strongly suggests Mikhail Gorbachev and his military chiefs are constructing a "triple-tiered" radar system to cover western approaches to their country. Early-warning radars to discover an incoming missile or aircraft attack, permitted by the ABM Treaty, long have been in place in the Soviet Union. That raises this question: Why the new radars? The Baranovichi radar, the size of two pyramids, resembles the one in Krasnoyarsk that Reagan says clearly violates the ABM Treaty. It duplicates two other huge radars (whose discovery has not been acknowledged by the administration) picked up in August by a U.S. spy satellite near Skrunda, on the Lithuanian border, and Mukachevo, on the Czech border.

Casey and Weinberger argue these two giant radars transcend the need for early warning. Now the further overlap of the radar discovered Nov. 10 creates a "triple-tiered" system that could mean only one thing: a nationwide missile-defense system.

State Department and some Arms Control and Disarmament Agency specialists claim that even if the new radars are designed for a nationwide defense system, the Soviets do not possess anything approaching enough interceptor missiles. Pentagon and CIA officials mock that argument as wishful thinking. They point to the Norwegian government's discovery of a mysterious "white light" produced by warhead explosions in recent Soviet missile tests over Northern Europe. Photographs under intense scrutiny in the CIA suggest this "white light" may be millions of tiny fragments or pellets of steel released from a warhead to destroy incoming missiles. Such an antimissile interception system seems ludicrously home-made compared to the high-tech research of Reagan's SDI. But some officials believe that for all its horse-and-buggy simplicity, it might work—if pinpoint radar targeting of attacking missiles can be achieved with the Kremlin's new triple-tiered system.

Declaring the Soviet Union on the verge of a defensive "breakout" would have momentous implications for the policies of Reagan and his new national security adviser and for the future of this nation.

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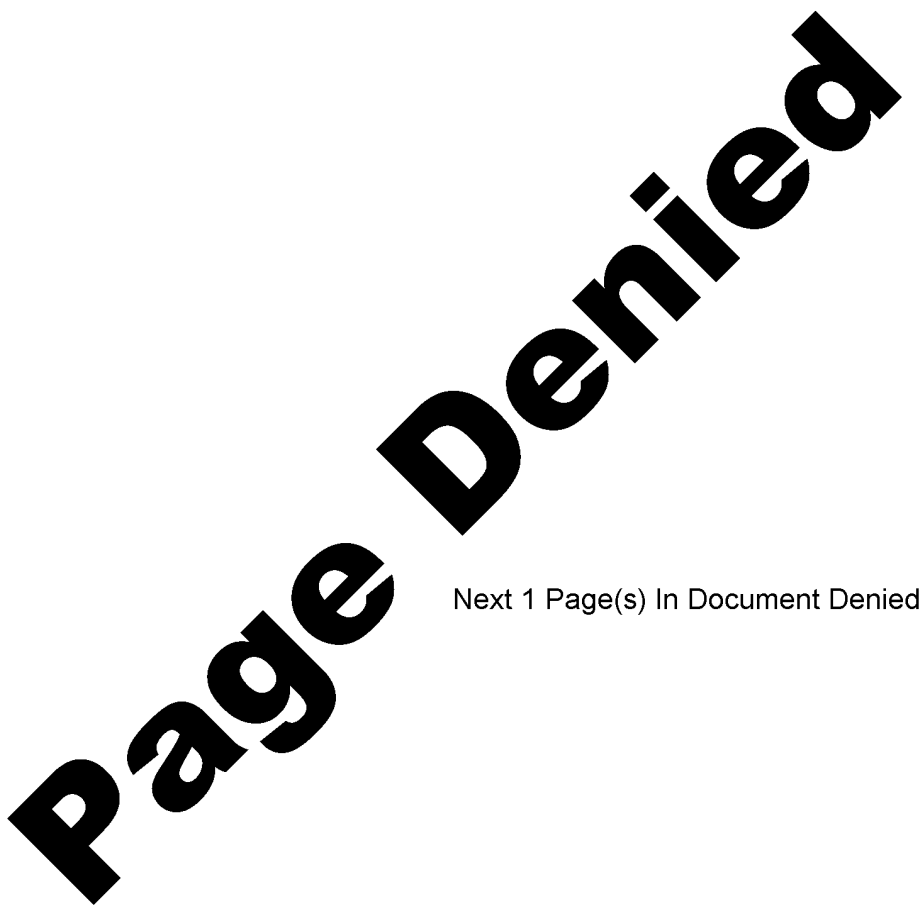

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied